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SUBJECT: ZAGREB WEEKLY ACTIVITY REPORT - OCTOBER 16, 2008

REF: ZAGREB 704

11. (U) NEW MINISTERS OF INTERIOR AND JUSTICE SWORN IN:
New Minister of Interior Tomislav Karamarko, formerly head of the Security Intelligence Agency, and Minister of Justice, Ivan Simonovic, a law professor with a long diplomatic career, were approved by parliament on Friday, October 10 and sworn into office that afternoon. Opposition SDP members abstained on the vote, but other parliamentarians, including the second largest opposition party, support the nominations. The new acting Police Director, Vladimir Faber, must formally apply for his position. A police spokesperson also confirmed that former Director of Police, Marijan Benko, would be a new advisor to the Minister of the Interior. Benko and the previous Ministers of Interior and Justice were fired by Prime Minister Sanader after the high-profile "mafia-style" murder of a local lawyer (REFTEL). Prime Minister Sanader said he expects the newly appointed ministers and police chief to engage in a determined fight against organized crime and the mafia. (CZimmer)

12. (U) CROATIAN POLICY MAKERS VISIT US TO STUDY WITNESS FACILITATION AND ASSET FORFEITURE MODELS:
Croatia's Attorney General, his deputy, the Director of Police and the Ministry of the Interior's Head of Public Relations, International Relations and Analytics, participated in an ICITAP-funded week-long study visit to California, October 4-11. Although the Attorney General and Police Director returned to Croatia near the start of the trip due to a highly-publicized "mafia-style" murder in Zagreb which resulted in the firing of the Police Director and two Ministers (REFTEL), the remaining delegation met with the FBI, U.S. Marshals, and prosecutors at the federal and local levels to learn about U.S. models for management of witnesses, victims, and seized assets, as well as how law enforcement agencies at various levels cooperate with one another for successful criminal investigations and convictions. Post anticipates that some of the practices observed on the visit will be incorporated in upcoming amendments and revisions to Croatia's Law on Police, Law on Police Authority, and the Criminal Procedure Act. (CZimmer)

13. (SBU) SDP NO CONFIDENCE MOTION STILL BORN:
The Social Democratic Party (SDP) said last week it would seek a no confidence motion in the government for its inability to tackle organized crime. SDP leader Zoran Milanovic ridiculed the Prime Minister's sacking of the Interior and Justice Ministers in response to the murder of a young lawyer (REFTEL), and demanded that Prime Minister Sanader himself resign. The no confidence motion has been

added to the parliamentary agenda for October but without an exact date for debate. Moreover, the motion was not well coordinated among other opposition parties. Vesna Pusic, a senior member of the second largest opposition party (Croatian Peoples' Party) said that this was not the time for partisanship because the situation was too serious. The leader of the SDP's main opposition partner in Istria also indicated that it would be a poor time to bring down the government. President Stjepan Mesic, at many times critical of the Premier, also has been lukewarm to the idea of bringing down the government at this time.

COMMENT: The SDP gambit comes on the heels of several weeks of criticism in the media for its lackluster return from summer vacation and the missed opportunities to criticize the government in September. Its actions to bring down the government seem out of step with general public reaction to what is generally perceived as mob-linked killing. Sanader's quick actions have largely played well in the press despite strong public sentiment that the government could have done more over the years to combat organized crime. (DMeges)

14. (U) CROATIAN JUDICIARY DROPS CHARGES AGAINST ETHNIC SERB: Croatian authorities dropped war crimes charges against an ethnic Serb, Ernest Radjen, due to lack of evidence and released him from detention. Radjen was arrested in Greece last year and extradited based on a Croatian arrest warrant based on allegations that he failed to prevent a 1991 massacre of some 50 civilians, mostly women and older men, in two villages near the central coastal town of Zadar while he served as commander of military police of the former

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Yugoslav Peoples' Army (JNA). After a preliminary investigation that included interviews with witnesses, the Zadar County attorney's office lowered the charges against Radjen from war crimes to threatening the security of Croatia, an offense that was covered by an amnesty law several years ago. Radjen told press that since the very beginning he was surprised with his arrest, since he was with the JNA and not the local Serb rebels at the time of the atrocities. Radjen thanked those Croatian civilians who testified on his behalf. He spent 550 days in detention and his defense attorneys told the press that they are planning to sue the Croatian state over this matter. The case is likely to strengthen calls for Croatia to proactively review several hundred cases with INTERPOL arrest warrants where the indictments or convictions in absentia are based on questionable grounds. (CZimmer)

15. (U) CROATIA-SLOVENIA BORDER DISPUTE UNLIKELY TO SLOW EU NEGOTIATIONS: Outgoing Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel indicated on Monday October 3 that Slovenia may block Croatia's EU negotiations in up to five chapters because Croatia's negotiating positions contained documentation and maps that are viewed by Rupel as pre-judging ongoing bilateral border disputes. The Croatian Foreign Ministry responded that no documentation submitted to the EU pre-judged the outcome of the border disputes and emphasized that Croatia would like to resolve the border issue via international arbitration. A spokesman for the EU Commission emphasized the bilateral border dispute is unrelated to Croatia's EU negotiations and noted the French EU Presidency is working hard to forge agreement among all EU member states to move Croatia's EU bid along. Croatia hopes the next intergovernmental conference with the EU, which is set for October 30, will allow for the opening of five additional chapters -- "Free Movement of Capital", "Regional Policy and the Coordination of Structural Instruments", "Taxation",

"Justice, Freedom and Security", and "Environment". (DMeges)

16. (U) USG PARTNERS WITH CROATIANS TO FUND THREE NEW
DEMINING PROJECTS:

Working with the Croatian Mine Action Center (CROMAC) and the International Trust Fund of Slovenia (ITF), the Embassy approved on October 10 three new demining projects in Karlovac and Sibenik counties at a total cost of 350,000 USD. The projects, which should be completed in the next two months, will clear mines from agricultural lands and natural springs in Karlovac County, while in Sibenik County the project will restore access to the sole water supply for two villages. Although ITF-Slovenia administers the USG funds in order to generate matching fund donations, these three projects had a decidedly local flavor: the matching partners are almost exclusively Croatian and include a Sibenik Lions Club and Karlovac County's demining fund. (CZimmer)

17. (U) SACEUR CRADDOCK VISITS ZAGREB:

General Bantz J. Craddock, the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, visited Zagreb on October 14. General Craddock met with President Stjepan Mesic, Prime Minister Ivo Sanader, Defense Minister Branko Vukelic and Chief of General Staff Josip Lucic. Media covering the visit reported that Craddock hoped to see Croatia at the next NATO summit as a full member. Sanader said Croatia would be a credible ally that would continue to contribute to international peace and security. Minister Vukelic noted that membership in NATO did not mean that Croatia would stop cooperating with the other countries in the region. Croatia's defense reforms and its participation in international peace missions, including ISAF, were also acknowledged. (ZTomic)
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